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ABSTRACT

This paper takes a historical and methodological approach to explain the gap of reciprocal awareness that exists between many archivists and librarians. It is argued that a much closer relationship between the two professions would enable them to confront common issues in the coordinated manner necessary for optimum benefits to society. The historical evolution of the disconnection between the archives and library fields is discussed, as is the recent development of the archives field and the common co-existence of libraries and archives, both administratively and physically, in universities today. Differences in methodologies between the two fields are discussed in terms of acquisition and appraisal, processing (arrangement and description), reference procedures, and educational preparation. Shared concerns are also discussed, including automation, legislative and legal issues, preservation, and the logic of confronting mutual problems by pooling resources. (THC)

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LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES: CRITICAL DISTINCTIONS, MUTUAL CONCERNS,

AND THE NEED FOR INCREASED COOPERATION

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"But what do you do up there?" --if I had a dollar for every time I've been asked that question since my arrival as university archivist at the University of Toledo I'd be able to consider early retirement. My title, at various times, has been misunderstood as university architect, activist, archeologist, archer, and most intriguing and perhaps somewhat appropriate, anarchist. Much to my surprise and disappointment, I discovered that a basic unfamiliarity with the functions of my position was not confined to the administrative staff or teaching faculty (i.e. those who may have been less likely to come in contact with an archives in the past). Rather, it was shared as well by many of my colleagues in the library, the one segment of the university in which my operation holds the most in common. Conversely, I also discovered that my own knowledge of the objectives and inner-workings of an academic library was seriously deficient.

This paper, in a sense, stems from this recognition that a gap of reciprocal awareness exists between archivists and librarians. The discovery of this gap is hardly something I can claim as a product of my own revolutionary thinking; the undesirable tendencies of both professions to march exclusively to their own drummers have been written about for over thirty years. But it is precisely this point which causes me to raise the banner again. After these many years, little progress seems to have been made in building the bridge between the archival and library fields (as well as other information sciences such as records management) which would enable those professions to confront common issues in the coordinated

manner necessary for optimum benefits to society. One more cry in the wilderness will doubtlessly leave safe the general status quo, but the message begs to be retold to new audiences. With any luck, at least my corner of the world will perhaps develop practical applications from sermons such as the following.

To explain how the disconnection between the two fields has developed I'd like to take two approaches: 1) historical and 2) methodological. My emphasis will be on the archives side, since I believe you will find that information a bit more novel. I will then attempt to support the argument that a much closer relationship between these professions must be established. And, I will offer some specific suggestions on how we can contribute toward such a broad goal, in turn enhancing our personal job effectiveness.

For those of you who aren't precisely clear on just what the word archives means or what an archivist does, a few basic definitions are in order. According to the Society of American Archivists--the archival counterpart of the ALA--"archives" can be defined as "the noncurrent records of an organization or institution preserved because of their continuing value." It can also refer to the agency responsible for servicing these records, or it can mean the physical location of the materials (e.g. The National Archives or The University of Toledo Archives). The main linking concept between these variations on the word "archives" is that it concerns the handling of records of permanent value created or received by an institution or organization. Organizations or institutions which receive and create the most records of permanent value include federal and state government, business and labor organizations, churches or religious organizations, and educational institutions (more specifically, colleges and universities).

Many, but by no means all, units within these broad sectors have formal archival programs for dealing with their records. The kinds of records such an organization or institution might consider of permanent, or archival, preservation include reports, administrative correspondence, meeting minutes, financial summaries, institutional publications, audiovisual items, and personal papers of some employees. A very small percentage of the records of an institution are elevated to archival status--the National Archives estimates that only 2% of the governments records are kept permanently, while in universities that figure reaches closer to 10%. For a record to be considered of permanent value an affirmative reply must result from one of the two following questions: 1) Is the record of use to the institution for continuing administrative, legal, or fiscal purposes? and 2) Is it of value to society as a whole as historical evidence for research purposes? Consideration of these questions in evaluating records is among the several tasks of an archivist. The Society of American Archivists more exactly defines an archivist as "A person responsible for or engaged in one or more of the following activities in an archival repository: appraisal and disposition, accessioning, preservation, arrangement, description, reference service, exhibition, and publication." If you noted similarities between these terms and those found in the lexicon of librarianship my point is beginning to be made.

While the library profession in this country has a long and distinguished history, the development of archival repositories is quite recent. This fact in itself helps explain why the two professions have not established closer ties. As the library field continues to mature and expand upon its well-proven methods of

information control, the archival community is still struggling to find a true identity and a universally-accepted theoretical base. It is peculiar that this is so because archives, actually, were the ancient forerunners of libraries. However, the maintenance of society's recorded happenings, so much a part of early Greek and Roman culture, lost its importance through the middle ages and beyond. It was not until the French Revolution in the 1790s that wide-spread public recognition of the importance of protecting institutional information (specifically governmental records guaranteeing cherished rights) re-surfaced and major archival activity re-developed. Although the establishment of formal archives in several countries followed shortly after the French Revolution, the United States did not move in this direction until the twentieth century. In fact the National Archives is quite a young agency having been formed in 1934. And the Society of American Archivists was organized in 1936, in contrast to the ALA's founding in 1876.

Since the 1930s, however, archives of all types have proliferated rapidly in the U.S. The most growth has occurred in the college and university sector, which now claims the largest number of archivists of any institutional category. It is the university archives which is most relevant to our discussion, since the academic setting provides the best laboratory for examining archive/library relations. While not exclusively a university phenomenon, archives and libraries most frequently co-exist in this environment. Indeed persons in the university library are usually responsible for establishing an archives, and the archives themselves have often been, and in some cases still are, run by a regular librarian.

The last coincidence sheds further light on the gap between the two fields. Though attitudes among the two professions toward each other have not been overtly antagonistic, they have not always been especially cordial. Some archivists have fumed over the mismanagement of certain archives by library-trained personnel whose natural inclinations are to apply library methods to archival materials. These archivists would do well to consider also that were it not for the efforts of these librarians, mismanagement or not, many archives existing today would not be. Librarians, on the other hand, have occasionally been found guilty of viewing archival science as a peripheral area of information management, perhaps not worthy of the status of librarianship. The point here is not that all archivists and librarians have purposely pulled away from each other, but to this point, the need to maintain and defend professional identities has somewhat impaired a mutual focus of energy on common goals.

The differences between archives and libraries, of course, are not solely the product of separate historical development or the emphasis on professional distinction. The methods used by each to carry out its mission are quite different. The reason is not in the types of materials handled by each--indeed, the kinds of informational media found in libraries are almost identical to those found in archives, although the proportional amounts are rarely the same. Like the librarian, the archivist must deal with maps, newspapers, manuscripts, audiovisuals, microfilm, and even books. The difference in methodology instead stems from the origin of the information. For the librarian, the source of an item, or from whom it is acquired, is not considered a critical factor in arranging, describing, or referencing functions. But for the archivist, the origin, or

provenance, is the key to how materials are processed and made available. In general terms, librarians treat their materials as discrete units, each considered to be on its own merit, while archivists must view their materials within the context in which they were created or accumulated.

I can best make this point by presenting a number of shared archival and library activities and discussing the different approaches taken by each group. The first activity is that of acquiring materials. Libraries generally obtain things via purchase, adhering carefully to an acquisitions policy which reflects the needs of users, the holdings of nearby libraries, the availability of interlibrary loan, and the limits of financial resources. The acquisitions librarian chooses from a vast supply of published material from all parts of the world, and should he decide not to select something, he need not be concerned that the item will never be available to users. The archivist, on the other hand, does not purchase archival records, but instead, since they have already been created or received by the institution for which he works, he inherits them. Although the archivist does not follow an "acquisitions policy" per se, he does develop certain standards for determining which institutional records are to be kept permanently. This process of "appraisal" implies something quite different from the librarian's selection methods in that an archivist, by setting the criteria for permanency, is actually sentencing certain unique materials to their demise. When we remember that only 10% or less of an institution's records are preserved as archives, we can understand why this responsibility is usually considered an archivist's most weighty.

The second activity we can examine is that of processing, or more specifically arrangement and description. The library

profession has developed classification systems for arrangement purposes. The classification scheme adopted by a library is a predetermined apparatus into which each item received can be appropriately fitted. In most cases, the call number itself is pre-assigned and identifies a specific item within the system. With archival arrangement, no such method of classification for overall items is possible, although there have been attempts to formulate one. The reasons for this are twofold. 1) The sheer physical bulk of modern records renders the task incomprehensible. Even though only a small percentage of records find their way to an archives, this can still mean that thousands of cubic feet, translating into millions of items, would have to be analyzed piece by piece. And, 2) as I mentioned earlier, the archivist firmly believes that a document's origin is critical to its significance. A second principle is that the original order in which materials were maintained provides the only meaningful context for their research. If one removes a record to place it in a subject classification system, the record's purpose for creation or receipt, and often the actual informational content as well, is lost. In terms of description techniques, the cataloging librarian benefits from the fact that most of the necessary information (e.g. title, author, dates, chapter headings, etc.) is self-contained or self evident in the described unit. Since, again, the archivist takes a collective or group approach as opposed to a unit analysis, the descriptive information often surfaces only after careful, lengthy examination of records "series" coinciding with research to determine their relationship to the function of the origination office. Although an archivist will often use catalog cards to describe briefly the

scope and content of a record series, he much more frequently uses a page format allowing for greater elaboration on subject strengths and weaknesses and for listings of file folder titles. The quantity and diversity of information found in many archival series or record groups demands that the descriptive aids provided researchers be quite thorough.

A third activity which distinguishes archives from libraries is reference procedures. These differences are best reflected in the storage methods used by each. Theoretically, a patron in today's standard library could identify, browse, locate, and study library materials without ever confronting a librarian. (I know some academic librarians who will testify that students can't locate the bathroom without librarian guidance let alone try to find books on their own, but in theory it is possible.) This is not the case in an archives. Because, for preservation and security purposes, materials are stored in areas not accessible to the public, the user must rely upon the archival staff for both reference assistance and physical retrieval. This works to the user's advantage in most cases because it will always be true that the the best finding aid is that found between the archivist's ears. Even the most detailed descriptive devices are wholly incapable of identifying every research possibility and inter-relationships contained in the thousands of feet of records. To an even greater extent than the reference librarian, there is no substitute for an archivist intimately acquainted with the idiosyncrasies of his collection.

While not an activity per se, the matter of educational training is another which characterizes the two professions separately. Simply put, archivists currently lack a formal

educational vehicle for entering their profession. For several years, archivists have contemplated the idea of an accredited degree program in archival administration. In the 1970s, the SAA's Committee on Education and Professional Development drafted a set of archival training program guidelines which, it was hoped, could serve as a starting point for developing accreditation standards. More recently, however, the SAA decided to table indefinitely the issue of accreditation, citing an apparent lack of interest among current educators, a general resistance of new approval standards by universities, and an increasing de-emphasis on credentialism in employment influencing factors. As a result, archivists come from all walks of life. Job openings generally stipulate a master's degree as a minimum qualification; the usual preference is for an MLS or an MA in history along with some specific archival coursework, practica, or institute participation.

Archivists have long been at odds over which discipline provides the best framework for such professional training. A majority, though a small one, of relevant course offerings is found in library schools. However, some argue that the library approach neglects the historical knowledge and perspective so critical to the archivist's appraisal and reference functions. Others insist that placing the courses in a history curriculum reduces the chance that the student will be given a look at the broad issues of information science. And, still others promote the notion that archival administration is a unique discipline worthy of degree programs independent of these other areas. In short, archivists need to come to terms with some very basic questions before a formal accreditation mechanism can be established. Although the quality of many current

programs is high, archival education still lags behind its library counterpart which long ago dealt with accreditation and is moving more cohesively into areas of exploration commensurate with new developments in the information field.

So far I've discussed how archives and libraries differ, both in terms of the historical evolution of the professions and the manner in which members of each perform and are trained to perform their duties. I've contended that these differences have predominated in how each group views the other. Indeed each occupation is unique and should continue to be regarded as such. But although the societal role each plays is distinct, their overriding mission--that of acquiring, preserving, and making available information--is identical. It is of paramount importance that the members of both professions focus more directly on this broad, shared mission because it is only by doing so that common, urgent concerns can be successfully addressed.

The number of issues impacting on and being confronted by both libraries and archives is surprisingly large. I offer here just a handful of the more significant ones. First on my list, and certainly among the top priorities of each profession, is automation. When we think of automation, we usually consider the question of how we are going to adapt it to our operations. In this respect, librarians seem to be further along than archivists who are still struggling to find a programming method appropriate for their diversified holdings and more elaborate description devices. A second question regarding automation is, "how are we to deal with information produced in automated form?" Here archivists may have

the lead as they are being faced increasingly with the products of the "paperless office" proponents. Methods of storing, describing, and accessioning information on tapes, discs, COM, and printouts are being developed by necessity in several archives repositories. In short, the information technology revolution so long promised is indeed upon us now. Archivists will benefit from the library profession's efforts in automating description and usage functions, while librarians will find the archivists' approaches to handling new informational media helpful. These trade-offs will occur most quickly if an acute awareness of the shared nature of these goals is achieved.

Another area of mutual concern is that of legislative or legal elements of the information world. Specifically I'm thinking of such things as copyright, tax legislation dealing with donations of books or manuscript collections, The Freedom of Information Act, and the status of granting agencies which assist libraries and archives, such as the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. Everything I just named is currently being questioned, attacked, or formally addressed by our government, and in each case the two professions desire the same basic outcome. Through the combined attention of both groups, influencing efforts can be much more effective than through separate attempts.

The preservation of books and documents was long viewed as an exotic endeavor confined to a smattering of rare book and antique manuscript enthusiasts. Certainly librarians, whose items are usually replaceable, saw little reason to dwell on the problems and solutions of conservation. Even archivists, with their overwhelming majority of unique materials, felt constrained to focus initially on

preservation as it applies to acquiring records which would never survive as opposed to the preservation of records in their possession. Today, both professions recognize the epidemic of materials deteriorating on their shelves and have heard the grim predictions for the life expectancy of recently-produced paper-based information. And, both professions are finally taking an organized, critical look at the situation. By uniting talents and resources, archivists and librarians can more quickly find the answers to saving the information they are charged to protect and make available. As one author on the subject put it, "Because the materials of archives and library collections exhibit so many basic similarities and almost no fundamental differences, the preservation problems of one are the preservation problems of the other...." Indeed, the matter is imminent; we can't afford to waste time going separate ways, reinventing each other's wheels in some cases or failing to address other aspects altogether.

The list of shared concerns goes on. Collection development, standardization, public relations, and financial exigency are among them. Of course, cooperative approaches in dealing with many of these have not not been entirely neglected. The National Coalition to Save our Documentary Heritage, a significant lobbying force in Washington is supported by both professions. Archivists and librarians most interested in studying the preservation question are arranging to share information on new techniques and products. And, employees of the National Archives are consulting regularly with Library of Congress personnel involved in that institution's major mass deacidification and optical disk storage experiments. Still, the general predisposition of the various information professions to

ignore their interrelationships and ultimate sameness of purpose prevents necessary further collaboration. Just as an example, in the past year, three separate conferences on the subject of preservation were held in Ohio. Two were sponsored by library groups, one by the state archival organization. Each dealt with topics relevant to both archivists and librarians, yet virtually no effort was made by the sponsors to invite members of their related profession or to co-sponsor. As former Librarian of Congress L. Quincy Mumford once commented succinctly, such efforts to explore common areas must be joint, for "it is philosophically and economically unsound that they be otherwise." It is noteworthy in itself that this simple remark needs to be heard today just as it did in 1970.

Finally, this message can also have meaning beyond that of professional intercommunication. Applied to our daily work environment, it allows us to direct better attention to the two professions' most important shared concern--the user of information. As I've mentioned, many archives and libraries, particularly in the university setting, are attached both physically and administratively. The methodological differences between the two operations are such that this attachment is not self-evident or required, but the similarities of broad purpose make it, in my mind, highly desirable. If I, as a university archivist, make the necessary effort to understand better the holdings, policies, and procedures of the university library, I know I am making myself a better reference source for archival researchers. I am convinced that librarians of all types, not just reference people, can similarly benefit from a reciprocal effort. Skills in acquisition, cataloging, and collection development can all be mutually enhanced through sharing of

techniques. This applies equally for those who work in a situation in which the archives is not a part of the library or even where there is no archives at your institution at all. There are bound to be archival repositories, and other libraries for that matter, in the immediate region, knowledge of which can be useful in your daily work.

By thus increasing our understanding of the methods and materials of our related units, we are contributing to the goal of closer cooperation on a profession-wide basis. We can also do this by working in our local and regional organizations to develop programs of mutual interest and to invite inter-professional participation. And, of course, we can simply attempt to spread the word informally or formally at gatherings such as this. Increased cooperation will improve our ability to manage information in an age of transition. More importantly it will enable us to serve much more effectively our users who care little about the differences between libraries and archives. Their perception is of a vast informational universe from which specific portions must be assimilated. Let us concentrate harder on seeing our tasks through their eyes.